

Time off for dependants

By law, anyone [legally classed as an employee](#) can take time off to help a dependant with an emergency. The law is the Employment Rights Act 1996.

A dependant is a close family member or someone who depends on you.

Who counts as a dependant

An employee's dependants can include:

- their husband, wife, civil partner or partner
- their child
- their parent
- a person who lives in their household (not tenants, lodgers or employees)
- a person who relies on them, such as an elderly neighbour

How much time someone can take

The law does not say how much time an employee can take off, or how many occasions. It just says the amount should be 'reasonable'.

The employer should be as flexible as they can be, depending on the employee's circumstances. How much time they need will depend on what has happened.

When to use this type of leave

An employee can take time off if they need to help a dependant when there's an unexpected problem or emergency.

For example:

- helping a dependant who is ill, injured or assaulted
- taking a dependant to hospital when they go into labour unexpectedly
- a child's school unexpectedly closes
- a dependant dies

Pay

An employer might choose to pay their employees for this type of leave but they do not have to.

To find out what they're entitled to, employees should:

- check their organisation's policy, if there is one

- check their employment contract
- talk to their employer

Alternative types of leave

An employer might offer other types of leave that employees could use instead of time off for dependants.

For example they might be able to take:

- compassionate leave
- unpaid special leave

These types of leave might be alternatives if:

- an employee has an emergency but the right to time off for dependants does not apply – for example, if the person they need to help is not a dependant
- they are a better option for the employee – for example, if the organisation offers pay for compassionate leave, but not for time off for dependants

To find out if they can take these types of leave, employees should check:

- with their employer
- what's written in their contract
- what their organisation's policy says, if there is one

Depending on an employee's individual circumstances, there might be other ways to take time off. For example they might:

- use holiday entitlement, if they want to
- take sick leave, if they're not well enough to work

There are different types of leave employees can take when someone dies.

[Find out about taking time off for bereavement](#)

Contact the Acas helpline

If you have a question about time off for dependants or other types of leave, you can [contact the Acas helpline](#).